

Via Email: SenMKowall@senate.michigan.gov

August 14, 2013

Senator Mike Kowall
305 Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Senator Kowall:

We are writing to you in support of SB 312, a bill that would amend 2008 PA 549 entitled "Michigan Promise Zone Authority Act." The intent of the original legislation was to support ten severely economically challenged areas of the state by creating Promise Zones in which those areas could keep one-half of the annual State Education Tax growth for their area to support high school graduates in their attempt to enter college. Each Promise Zone had to raise funds to show community-based financial support to go along with the SET funds that could then be used as a "last-dollar" approach for college-bound students. The mechanism was formed with bi-partisan support in a time when historical SET increases were the norm. When the financial recession occurred, the Promise Zone mechanism no longer worked. The proposed legislation would help accomplish what the original drafters intended, creating a mechanism to help some students go to college.

The Muskegon Promise Zone is the only regional PZA in the state encompassing the entire county. The revised language would allow the Muskegon PZA to determine what portion of the county would receive help first. This revised legislation helps Promise Zones become more of an economic development tool by helping get the neediest students into college. We believe it is precisely those students who would remain in the community to work. The Promise Zone also creates an incentive for high school students to focus on and work toward college – something that might have been impossible for them without the support from the PZ mechanism. This bill would help us and other PZAs create a college-going culture and increase ongoing academic success.

Both Dr. Dale Nesbary, president of Muskegon Community College, and Dr. Lee Coggins, president of Baker College, are members of the Muskegon Promise Zone Authority board. They are hopeful that the Senate Economic Development Committee, because of the impact it could have on their respective colleges, would support SB 312 and the incentives built in the legislation for academic success for their students.

One of the added beneficial changes in this legislation would allow vocational education to be fostered by Promise Zone dollars. Governor Snyder has strongly emphasized the need to increase opportunities for students to participate in vocational and technical education. The value of the Muskegon Promise Zone is that it would be a catalyst for economic development and provide a successful framework for future growth in Muskegon County. The Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce supports the proposed changes because they see it as a supportive mechanism for young people that would lead to existing business growth and attract new business by building a better-educated workforce.

On behalf of the Muskegon Promise Zone Authority members and the thousands of students potentially impacted by this legislation we want to express our appreciation for the tremendous support shown by Sen. Goeff Hansen and Rep. Jon Bumstead. We also deeply appreciate the interest of Governor Snyder's office in the proposed changes. We ask, Senator Kowall, that you would also assist in the passage of SB 312 by your leadership in the Senate Economic Development Committee.

Best Wishes for Success,



David L. Sipka
Superintendent

Steve Parker
PZA Chairman

12 School Districts
Alcona
Pawnee